

# NOTiCiAS DEL OSO

January 20, 2009

#8

It's that time of year when everyone's gearing up for the big state assessments. We all know it, possibly because we all meet about it at least twice a week in some form. ESL is no exception, as most of you know, with TAKS plus TELPAS and LAT exams to consider.

However, I'm giving us all a break from talking about state tests for this newsletter. Next week I'll have a CliffNotes-esque version of what you need to know for TELPAS as a general education teacher. For this week, it's just a short little article about communicating with our LEP students.

*Erin Van Sickle*

## STRESSED OUT!

Our ESL and LEP kiddos deal with two different kinds of stress with which many teachers cannot claim an expertise. We may not be able to truly understand the stress issues, as the vast majority of us live in a country that not only operates in our language but also whose society we - and in most cases, our parents - were given membership to at birth. However, a basic knowledge of the students' stress issues can help us better serve our students.

## HOME STRESS

For some of these students, their parents immigrated to the United States because they wanted their children to have a better education if not a better life than they themselves had in their country of origin. Knowing that your parent took such a risk for you can cause a lot of stress for our students, as one pointed out to me recently, "Your mother gave you life, you have to pay her back forever!"

The important thing to remember is that these students may respond to stress at home, even if it's not apparent at school. We all deal with stress differently as individuals. For example, when I'm stressed out, I tend to become very focused and hate to be disturbed. My college roommate, on the other hand, needs to go running to relieve the stress before she can get any work done at all, and even then she prefers to have people surrounding her to be immediate de-stressors if needed.

While we may think that the student who goofs off in class and doesn't try is doing so because he or she does not care about their education, this may not be the case. They may be scared of trying and failing when their parents expect so much from them.

## LANGUAGE STRESS

No, I'm not talking about the mental stress of learning a new language. Yes, it's there, probably more of a problem than we could realize until we try to actually adapt to a completely new culture and language for a sustained period of time.

However, what the rest of this article is about is the actual stress that we as native English speakers place on words in our own language. The stress in the English language can be taken down to a letter level, which often accounts for the mispronunciations of our LEP students when trying to use an unfamiliar word. Moving on from letters to syllables, we can see a large difference between English and other “syllabic” languages in which no syllable is stressed more than another. Examples of such languages are French or Italian, which may explain why I’m hopeless at ordering in French. The biggest problem that stress causes at Berry, however, is when our students misunderstand teacher instructions or cannot communicate a need to a teacher due to unfamiliar stress patterns.

On a daily basis, we stress some words and bury others. For us, speaking in our stress pattern is an unconscious decision. In fact, we notice when others speak outside the modern accepted stress. I like to call people who speak without traditional stress “snooty” because they painstakingly pronounce everything with absolute perfection and precision.

Read the following sentence aloud, as though you might say it to a student who is bugging you while you write your daily objective or SAM on the board:

You can go to the dance if you buy a \$10 ticket from Mrs. Liska.

In casual speech, the underlined words would be stressed:

You can go to the dance if you buy a \$10 ticket from Mrs. Liska.

Some people may also stress the “you” and “if,” depending on which student you are speaking to, or how much you rely on stress to convey your message. In any case, this can cause a problem for students when we’re giving them everyday instructions. It explains why many students may commonly write or speak without prepositions and article adjectives in the early stages of language development - as these are commonly deemphasized in casual speech.

Luckily, most teachers DO speak with a bit of a “snooty” air when standing in front of the class to make sure that we’re understood. The important thing to remember is that if a student needs a sentence repeated multiple times, it may be because of the stress we’re unknowingly placing on our words.

## ESL Students of the Week



<u>Name:</u> Johnny Barcenas	<u>Name:</u> Michael Medina
<u>Grade:</u> 6th	<u>Grade:</u> 6th
<u>First language:</u> Spanish	<u>First language:</u> Spanish

Fun personality fact: With a quiet environment, Johnny often finishes long before most of the class!

Fun personality fact: Michael, excels at creative and oral presentations, despite his LEP status.